

Centennial Plastics celebrates 25 years in Hastings

By Jose Perez, HEDC/Chamber Director of Marketing and Promotions

HASTINGS — What began as a leap of faith by four industry veterans has grown into one of the region’s leading manufacturers, as Centennial Plastics celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2026.

Centennial Plastics President Pat Mertens said the milestone reflects decades of persistence, planned growth, and a commitment to employees and customers.

“It’s a big achievement,” Mertens said during an exclusive interview with the Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Corporation. “We believed we could build something better, and that’s what led us to start the company.”

The company was founded in April 2001 after Mertens and his three business partners left Eagle Plastics when its ownership relocated — Pete Konen, David Schnase, and Larry Schnase. The group chose to focus on a smaller segment of the polyethylene pipe manufacturing industry, which they believed was being overlooked.

Mertens said the early stages required more than a year of preparation before production could begin. “There were a lot of tasks we had to complete before we could even get up and run,” he said. “We spent about 15 months ordering equipment, securing vendors and banking partners, and preparing to hire employees.”

Centennial Plastics opened with about 25 to 30 employees. Today, the Hastings facility employs roughly 100 people, with additional locations elsewhere. Mertens credited growth to healthy hiring practices and a concentration on employee retention. “You have to take care of good people,” he said. “We believe we have one of the best workforces in the area, and we make it a priority to support them.



Centennial Plastics, Inc. is located on 1830 Centennial Avenue in Hastings. (Courtesy Photo of Jose Perez).

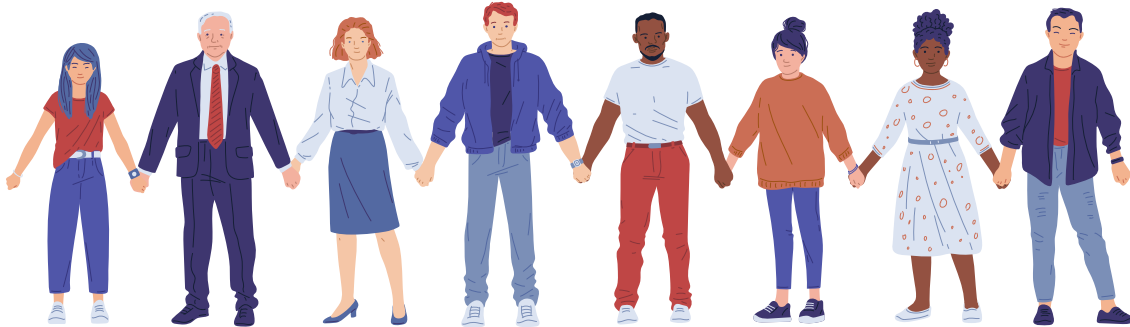
Securing financial backing and supplier relationships proved challenging in the early days. “Banking was a major hurdle because startups carry more risk,” Mertens said. “And having a consistent raw material supplier has been critical, especially during disruptions. “Over the years, Centennial has weathered major global events, including the Sept. 11 attacks, the 2008-2009 financial crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We started in April 2001, and just months later, 9/11 happened,” Mertens said. “Getting through that — and other challenges — made us stronger compared to some competitors.” During the COVID-19 pandemic, the company adjusted operations to protect employees while continuing production. Though some strategies, such as split shifts, proved difficult, Centennial continued to meet customer needs.

“We had customers tell us we performed better than any of their other vendors,” Mertens said. “That meant a lot to us.” Sustaining strong supplier relationships also helped the company manage global supply chain interruptions, he added. “Consistency and trust go hand in hand,” Mertens said. “We’ve built a reputation as a reliable partner, and we don’t cut corners.”

Beyond manufacturing, Centennial Plastics has remained active in the Hastings community. The company has partnered with Hastings College for internships, hired local students, and supported organizations such as the Hastings Family YMCA, Hastings Library, Hastings Museum, and Central Community College. “We always consider how something will impact our employees,” Mertens said. “If it benefits them and the community, we’re willing to support it.”

The company also contributed to the development of the Schnase 1906 District, named after one of its founding partners, Larry Schnase.



Looking ahead to goals to accomplish before the company’s 30th anniversary in 2031, Mertens said Centennial is focused on increasing its market coverage and investing in equipment and quality-control capabilities. The company has recently grown its presence in the southern United States and aims to continue expanding nationwide. “We want to be able to provide coverage across the country,” Mertens said.



Another goal he plans to accomplish is succession planning as long-time employees and founding members retire. “We’re starting to see people who have been here since day one retires,” Mertens said. “The challenge is finding the next generation to carry this forward.”

Despite that, Mertens said Centennial’s devotion to its people and values will continue to guide its future. “We believe in our employees and take care of them,” he said. “If you do that, everything else tends to fall into place.”